

Medical privacy language added to Friday's vote *House addresses issue less than week after Paul raised congressional awareness*

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WASHINGTON, DC - Less than a week after Rep. Ron Paul (R-Texas) introduced legislation to stop the federal government from creating a national 'medical ID' and database to track the details of Americans private lives, the leadership of the House has allowed similar language to be added to the Patient Protection Act, expected to be voted upon today. On Tuesday, Rep. Paul introduced the Patient Privacy Act.

"I'm pleased that the Congress has recognized this to be such a major issue that it will get discussion on the House floor today as part of the Patient Protection Act," Rep. Paul said this morning after learning of the decision. A physician for more than 30 years, Paul said he is not "overly excited" by the package being voted on Friday, but said privacy is a critical issue.

"The overall legislation - the Patient Protection Act - will end up only protecting HMOs and lawyers, and will actually weaken the provisions passed into law by the Texas legislature protecting patient rights in my state," said Dr. Paul.

"It is important, though, that the Administration understands that we oppose the establishment of this medical ID and the striping of privacy it embodies. Congress, and indeed the federal government, must be in the business of promoting liberty and protecting privacy, not limiting liberty and giving prying eyes easy access to our private lives."

Under the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996, the federal government was given the authorization to establish a database which would include the intimate details of individuals' medical histories, including a "unique medical identifier."

Such a database system could have a chilling effect on treatment for life-threatening conditions.

"As a physician, I know that effective treatment depends upon a patient's ability to place absolute trust in his or her doctor. But how can there be trust when patients know that any and all information given the doctor will be placed in a database accessible to anyone with the

patient's 'identifier?'"

Seen as a consistent fighter for constitutionally limited government and civil liberties, Rep. Paul said the medical identification card is a major encroachment on the right to privacy.

"The medical ID would allow federal agents, and possibly every medical professional, hospital, HMO and computer hacker in the country, to access individual records simply by checking an 'identifier' with the national database. Think of the numerous cases of IRS abuses that have recently been brought to Congress' attention, or the history of abuse of FBI files in the Executive Branch, or the recent case of a Medicaid clerk in Maryland who accessed a computerized database and sold patient names to an HMO."

Paul said neither Congress nor the public should think the issue has been put to rest if Friday's legislation passes. The Senate is unlikely to take up the over-reaching Patient Protection Act this year for many reasons, but there is a "good chance both chambers of Congress will be willing to address the issue of medical privacy if they hear loud and clear from their constituents that Americans find a national medical ID to be at odds with our American tradition of liberty."

Rep. Paul also plans on introducing an amendment to the Health and Human Services appropriations bill next week to prohibit funding for the development and implementation of the medical ID program.

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